For some attorneys, being a solo practitioner is an ambition they’ve been lucky enough to act on. For others, it can be an unexpected reality brought on by downsizing and hiring freezes in a shaky economy. For both groups, many of the challenges are the same.

If going solo is your choice, you’ve probably spent some time preparing for this move. If not, you’ll have to dive right in, setting up a functioning practice as quickly, efficiently and accurately as you can.

The first thing you might be tempted to do is to reach out for the familiar IT tools and processes that you used in your old firm. Don’t! These systems are too big and too complex for your needs now, and you’ll risk drowning in irrelevant details. Fortunately, there are many resources and right-sized solutions available that will help you chart these unfamiliar waters.

Arm yourself with information

Almost every state bar offers a Small Law Firm Startup Kit with CDs, print articles, Web contacts and more. The state bar Law Office Management Assistance Program (LOMAP) is an invaluable resource that will take you through all the critical steps, from integrating your technology to assisting with trust accounting and from getting and keeping clients to managing your operations.

It can also be useful to talk with people who are in the same boat. Join discussion groups and read blogs to pick up insights about what is working—and not working—for other solo firms.
Use technology to sharpen your edge

When it comes to competition, there will always be someone who knows more than you know and can advertise more than you can. Technology levels the playing field. By automating and standardizing your processes, the right software will allow you to deliver a first-class service even with the most limited resources. Software can be your assistant, your biller and your document creator, so you won’t have to hire outside help immediately. With a minimum of cost and effort, you can project an image of professionalism and success that will make your little sailboat look like a yacht.

Define your optimum “solo-ware” solution

One thing you know: you’re going to have to track money. Period. Most bar associations require triple reconciliation, and you simply can’t fulfill that requirement without a dependable billing and tracking software.

Consider what else you’ll need technology for:

• Reporting
• Document management
• Calendaring
• Phone, mail, email and Web research

Now think about what would be a good fit for you based on your learning style, your level of computer literacy, your current staffing situation (will this system augment or replace an assistant and/or outside accountant?) and your plans for growth (where do you want your boat to be a year from now?). Create a wish list that details the functionality, useability and scalability that you’re looking for, and you’re ready to go shopping.

Try before you buy

Get as many vendor references as you can through peers and bar association contacts. Then get demos from each and every vendor. During the demos, ask the sales representative specific questions: How can the software help me do this task? What’s involved in doing that? What happens when I add my first employee? My tenth? How will this work when I grow from one client to 50 clients?

Sign on with an expert

A sales rep may be the one who tells you about all the nifty product features. But the key person in the deal is a trusted partner who will help you put those features to work. Look for a consultant who is knowlegeable, resourceful and interested in you. Your vendor should be able to provide a list of consultants who know the product inside and out.

Thanks to the Internet, there are no limits to finding savvy assistance. Training and consulting—and virtual handholding—are all available 24x7. It’s a good rule of thumb to spend at least as much on training and support as you did on the software. Recent studies have proven that people who attend a structured training class are 50 percent more productive during the introductory period of learning something new than those who don’t.

Know who you can trust

At LexisNexis, we are committed to helping you spend more time practicing law and less time worrying about all the headaches of the business of law. Our solutions for small, specialized firms include award-winning software created with input from lawyers like you and are backed up by a highly experienced and dedicated services and support team.

PCLaw® billing and accounting software, the most widely used practice management software in North America, is a solution for just-starting and fast-growing solo law firms. This fully integrated time, billing and accounting software package is easy to use right out of the box. It can easily be upgraded with add-ons as your needs change. It will also help your firm expedite billing and manage trust, financial and client accounting tasks. The total cost of ownership is lower than the cost of most competitors’ products, because PCLaw requires less training and includes advanced accounting features like eBilling, remote entry, integrated payroll and credit card processing.

You can also get up and running fast with Time Matters® practice management software, a complete, centralized system for streamlined client matter and communications management. Some law firms have reported that Time Matters software lets them take on 30 percent more work with exactly the same resources. Paperless, integrated matter management saves you the time that you would otherwise spend filing and finding documents. Easy-to-use automated forms eliminate the need to retype information and reduces human errors. Easy-to-customize calendaring tools make sure that you hit every deadline right on time.

And with all the dedicated support and backing behind every LexisNexis® solution, you may be solo, but you won’t be alone.
LexisNexis® Practice Management
Transforming the Business of Law

We take the headache out of the business of law. Our innovative Practice Management products, content, and services enable you to more effectively serve your clients and manage your business.

To learn more, visit www.lexisnexis.com/law-firms/practice-management or call us at 800-328-2898.

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